

Request for expression of Interest



Honey Creek Resort State Park Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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WORKING WITH NATURAL RESOURCES AT HONEY CREEK RESORT STATE PARK

The 850 acres that comprise Honey Creek Resort State Park have some very special and unique plant and animal species. From “Day 1” of exploring Iowa’s opportunities for development of “destination” or “flagship” state parks, one of the guiding principals has been a commitment to protection of high quality natural areas within any park developed as a “destination state park.”

As a part of master plan development at Honey Creek, a team of recognized experts was contracted to survey and assess the natural features on the site and to help guide decisions on placement of facilities in the park. This team was headed by Dr. Thomas Rosburg of Drake University’s Biology Department. Other members of the team were Dr. James Christiansen, Dr. David McCullough and Dr. Dennis Schlicht. They surveyed plants, butterflies, small mammals, breeding birds and amphibians/reptiles. Their information provides valuable baseline data on the natural plant communities and on individual plant and animal species to be protected and interpreted within the park.

Sixteen “priority species” were identified, with twelve of those associated with remnant prairie habitats or semi-natural grassland habitats found throughout the project area. This team expressed significant reservations about adverse impacts resulting from habitat fragmentation, restricted management options, and the extreme scarcity of the types of habitat statewide that were going to be adversely affected if the original master plan was implemented.

These legitimate concerns resulted in significant modifications to the original master plan, primarily pulling development out of high-quality, sensitive natural areas. Significant portions of the highest quality prairie remnants are now in a “Preserve Area” along the eastern portion of the peninsula. In addition, modifications to the lodge parking lot location, creation of a habitat travel zone along the southwestern side of the peninsula and specific management measures to improve habitat for Henslow’s Sparrow, and acquisition of a tract of comparable biological diversity to mitigate for unavoidable damages were recommended. The team also

recommended ongoing biological monitoring and surveys at 5-year intervals to document changes that may occur on the site.

Most importantly, the team made the following concluding statement: “...the biological survey team believes that park development and biological integrity can coexist. As we see it, this project is an exceptional opportunity to demonstrate not only the value in incorporating natural biological value as an attraction for a park facility, but also to demonstrate that we have the conviction and ingenuity needed to accomplish it.”

The Gesicke Tract is a 592-acre upland parcel adjacent to the Sedan Bottoms Wildlife Area immediately east of Exline. The topography, soils, land use and general features of the Gesicke Tract resemble closely the Honey Creek State Park Resort property when it was acquired 30 years ago. Approximately one-third of the acquisition costs for this property came from appropriations to the Honey Creek Resort Park property. Members of the biological survey team have endorsed the acquisition as a suitable mitigation for Honey Creek development impacts. Biological assessments have begun on the property to establish a baseline knowledge of the communities and species already present. The Henslow’s Sparrow, a state and federally listed threatened species is known to exist on the Gesicke Tract.

The DNR will continue to place a high priority on protection and interpretation of the unique, high-quality species and plant communities on the Honey Creek Resort Park site. Interpretive hiking trails will be developed (2.5 miles were constructed in 2004), with alignments pre-approved by one or more members of the biological survey team or other experts knowledgeable of that team’s report and recommendations.

The 18-hole golf course will be designed so as to be an Audubon-certified bird friendly course. Runoff from the golf course and other developed sites on the peninsula will be strictly contained; and all developments will be sustainable in nature, energy efficient and low-impact.